USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CASE STUDY

EQUIP2
Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy ▪ Systems ▪ Management

Meeting EFA: Mali Community Schools

Introduction

At the start of 1990s, Mali's basic education system was failing under the weight of dictatorship. National public primary schools only accommodated 22 percent of the country's children. In 1991, Mali's military dictatorship ended, and the advent of the Third Republic promised a new era of opportunity. A democratic and more prosperous future for the country depended on, among other things, the expansion and improvement of education.

During the 1990s, the Malian government, with substantial external assistance, embarked on major education sector reforms aimed principally at redirecting resources towards the expansion of basic education. A separate ministry for basic education was created and significant external funding was made available to support investments in school construction and the training, hiring, and deployment of teachers. However, throughout the 1990s, demand for schooling outweighed the rate at which the government could place new teachers in classrooms. In 1995, a district official reported failing to meet requests to assign teachers from 60 villages, some of which had even constructed school buildings. Community school construction has a long history in Mali, but official recognition of such schools had no precedent before the remarkable expansion of community-initiated education seen in the 1990s. International and local nongovernmental organization (NGO) support helped build the community school movement that lasted from 1993 to 2003.

In Mali, community schools are education centers spontaneously started by the community members themselves, almost independent of government participation. The term also encompasses schools supported by international NGOs, usually with substantial external funding and local NGO participation. According to Recherche sur Education en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centre's (ROCARE's) *Le Rôle des ONG dans l'Éducation de Base au Mali*, published in 2001, the Malian community school effort originated in 1963 with the circumscription of San. Today, some 2,500 primary schools are officially considered community schools by the government, more than 1,500 of which—798 funded through Save the Children, 676 funded through World Education, and 80 funded through Africare—are supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, according to a 2001 study.

According to a 1994 law, community schools are a subcategory of private schools in Mali, defined as any not-for-profit education center created and managed by a community or association, as opposed to an individual or corporations. The law gave any community the right to open a school and granted official local authority recognition, provided the school met a set of simple criteria, including at least 20 students, a semi-permanent location, and demonstrated respect for the basic education

EQUIP2 is funded by the United States Agency for International Development

Cooperative Agreement No. GDG-A-00-03-00008-00

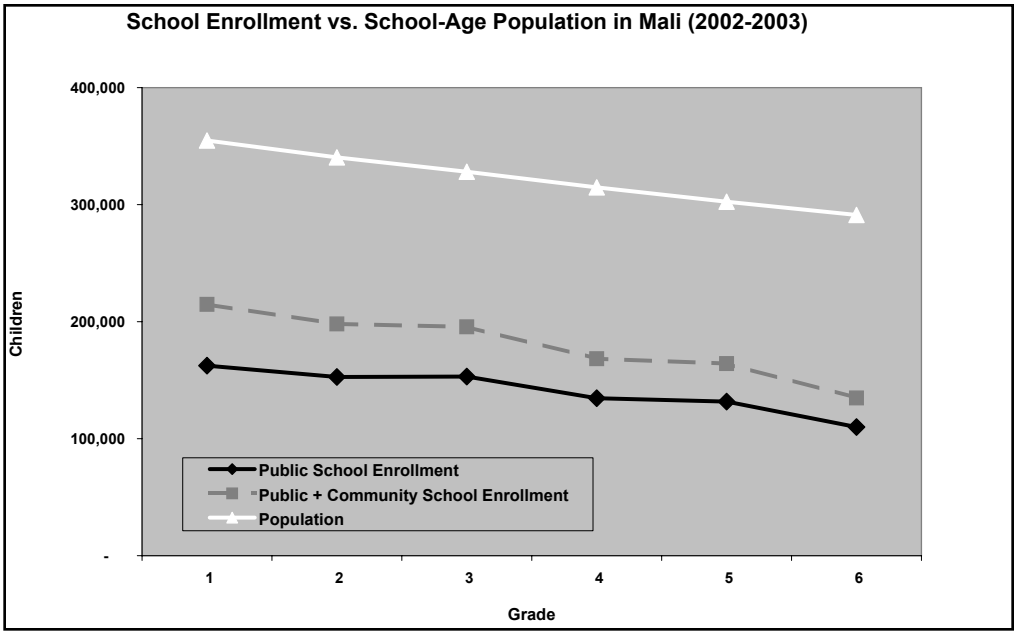
authority's academic orientation. In the interest of further developing community schools, the government published a community school promoter's guide, providing vital advice and information for starting and running community schools.

This case study examines the overall growth and impact of community schools in Mali during the last decade. It focuses on the Sikasso region, where Save the Children and 16 local NGOs, using USAID funds, have supported almost 800 schools—roughly 90 percent of the community schools in that region.

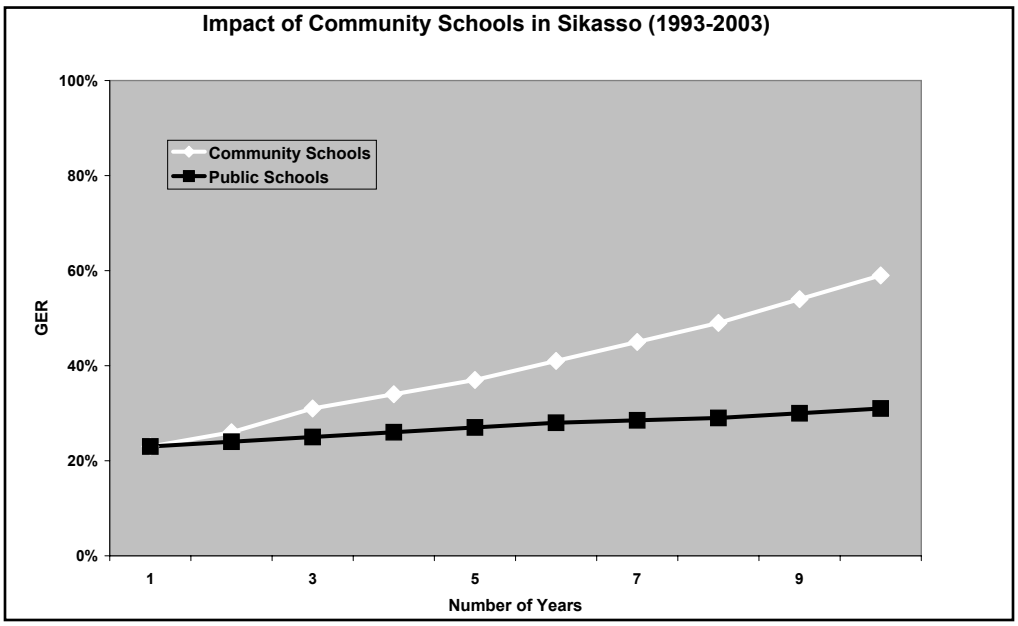
Access

Access to basic education has expanded in Mali during the last 10 years. Improved government support for school construction and teacher hiring enabled enrollment in public schools to increase from just over 500,000 in 1993 to almost 850,000 in 2003, according to the Malian Ministry of Education's 2002-2003 *Annuaire Statistique*. However, as depicted by the following graph, public primary schools in Mali still only accommodated 44 percent of the population of seven to 12 year-olds in 2003. At the same time that government-run schools were expanding, community schools grew at an even greater rate. In 2003, public schools added 230,000 single student places and increased the primary gross enrollment rate (GER) to 56 percent, or 67 percent including the 200,000 primary school students enrolled in private schools and medersas.

Malian public schools' intake capacity remains severely limited. In 2002 and 2003, public schools alone had a first grade gross intake capacity equal to 46 percent of the population of seven year-olds and a net admission rate of 39 percent. Community schools considerably increased the net admission rate to 53 percent and gross intake capacity to 61 percent in 2002 and 2003, according to Ministry of Education statistics.



The following graph shows expansion of public and community schools in the Sikasso region from 1993 to 2003. Community school enrollment in Sikasso was negligible in 1992 and 1993 at four schools and 240 students. Public primary schools alone accounted for a 27 percent GER—35 percent for boys and 15 percent for girls. Public primary schooling expanded slowly during the ensuing decade, at a rate of 0.8 percentage points per year, accommodating 35 percent of age-eligible children in 2003. The appearance of community schools accelerated the rate of expansion of access in Sikasso, pushing the GER in primary school for the region to 62 percent. From 1993 to 2003, community schools in Sikasso expanded from four schools to 900 schools—an a significant example of going to scale, especially when compared to the government's much slower expansion rate of access in Sikasso. When community schools are included, the GER for the region increased by 3.5 percentage points each year, a rate that would allow Sikasso to reach 100 percent in 14 more years.



Completion

It is useful to examine completion from two perspectives. First, how much do community schools in Mali help increase the percentage of 12 year-olds with sixth grade educations (i.e., primary school completion)? The Education for All (EFA)-Fast Track Initiative (FTI) goal is to achieve 100 percent completion among 12 year-olds by 2015. Secondly, do children enrolled in community schools even reach the sixth grade? These questions facilitate judgment of how effectively these schools educate children, compared to traditional public schools.

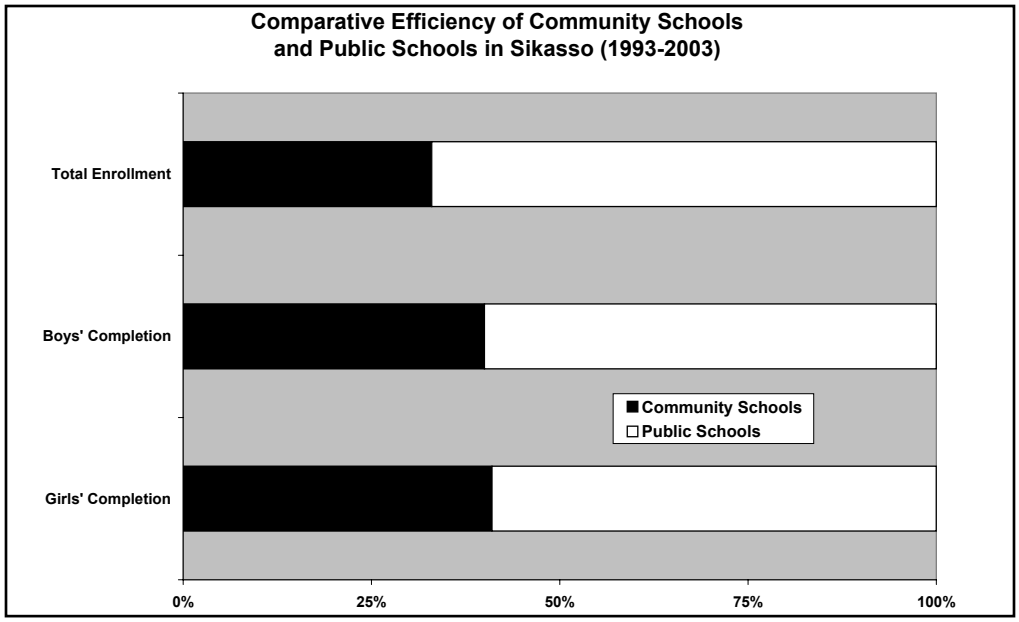
The national completion rate for public primary schools in Mali is extremely low. Net sixth grade enrollment is equivalent to only 26 percent of 12 year-olds in the country, according to the 2002-2003 *Annuaire Statistique*. By adding students who complete community school, the overall completion rate rises to 33 percent. Sub-national data

reveal a public primary completion rate of 22 percent in Sikasso, four percentage points below the national average. Community schools raise the completion rate in Sikasso above the combined national average to 37 percent.

Completion Rates in Community Schools vs. Public Schools by Gender (1993-2003)

		Public Schools	Community Schools	Total
Enrollment	Boys	84,480	42,510	126,990
	Girls	59,871	29,010	88,881
Completion	Boys	28%	19%	47%
	Girls	17%	12%	29%

Community schools, which account for only 33 percent of total primary school enrollment in Sikasso, contribute 40 percent of all boys' and 41 percent of all girls' completion of sixth grade in the region. Public primary school enrollment constitutes 67 percent of total enrollment, but contributes only 60 percent of boys' and 59 percent of the girls' completion. Given their share of the enrollment in Sikasso, community schools are producing a greater proportion of the boys and girls who reach grade six as depicted in the graph below.



Looking at completion in terms of the rate at which students who enroll in first grade go on to complete sixth grade also reveals that community schools are more effective than public schools in Sikasso. In that region, it is estimated that 56 percent of first graders reach sixth grade in public schools, according to a synthetic cohort analysis of net repeaters from Ministry of Education data. For girls, that figure is estimated at 49 percent. Community schools in Sikasso report an overall sixth grade completion rate of 67 percent and 57 percent for girls in Save the Children's *Annuaire Statistique des Écoles Communautaires, Rentrée Escolaire 2002-2003*. By this measure of completion,

community schools are 20 percent more effective overall and 16 percent more effective for girls than public schools in Sikasso.

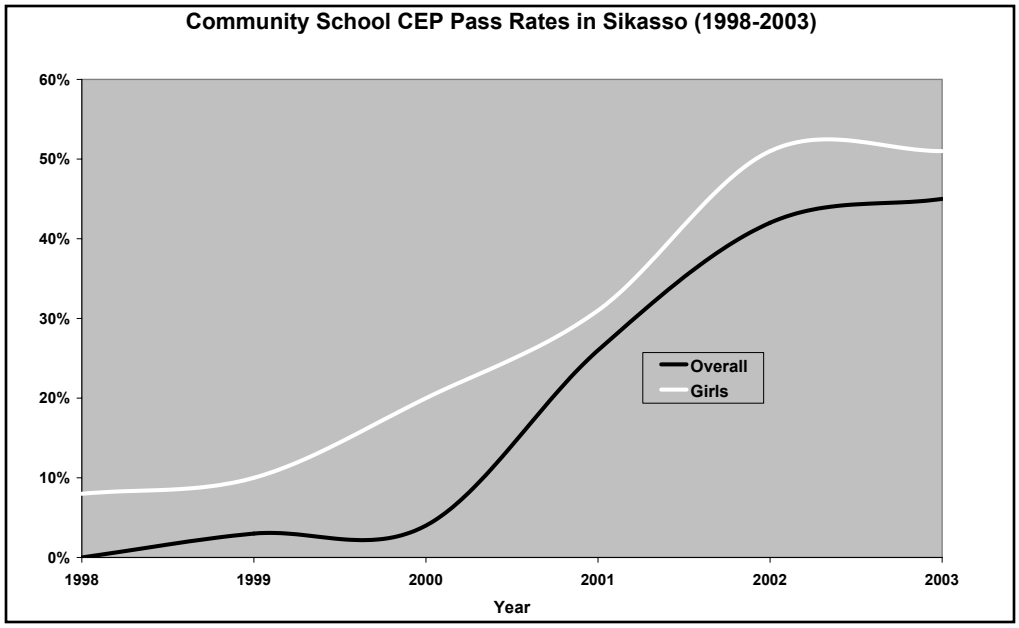
Learning

There are no comprehensive data on student learning in Mali. Researchers conducted only one study of learning in Sikasso community schools during the 1990s. The failure to systematically gather data on learning outcomes for students, despite a decade of promoting and funding community schools, is probably the Mali project's biggest shortcoming. The little information available is presented here to gauge learning in community schools compared to public schools.

A study conducted in 1997 evaluated the language and mathematics performance of 30 randomly selected students each from 13 community schools and 12 public schools in the same Sikasso localities, using tests developed with the Institute de Pédagogie National. Because of the difference in language of instruction, community school students were tested in Bambara and public school students tested in French.

The results of this evaluation revealed that community school students scored as well as or better than their public school counterparts in both language and math. Overall, community school students averaged 58 percent correct responses in language and 45 percent in math, according to Muskin in his 1997 Royal Polytechnic Institute Working Paper, *An Evaluation of Save the Children's Community Schools Project in Kolondieba, Mali.* In reading comprehension, community school students had 37 percent more correct answers than public school students. Girls in community schools outperformed girls in public schools by 35 percent. Students working in their native tongue generally outperform students struggling to learn and complete tasks in a second or third language, in this case French. A surprising outcome of this test, however, is that when both sets of students were given an identical passage of French dictation, 11 time as many community answered correctly as did public school students. In math, fourth grade students in community schools had 30 percent more correct answers than fourth grade public school students. The study also concluded that while community school students scored better than their public school peers in this test, all groups showed relatively low aptitude.

More recent data indicative of the learning outcomes of Sikasso community schools include pass rates on the Malian primary school completion examination (CEP). In its final report, Save the Children shows CEP pass rates for community school students improving from 8 percent in 1998 to 51 percent in 2003. The following graph shows that the pass rate for girls improved from 0 percent to 45 percent during the same period, according to Save the Children's *Community Schools Final Report, 30 September 1997 – 30 June 2003.* CEP pass rate data for public schools in Sikasso are not available.



Cost and Cost-Effectiveness

Community school costs are examined from several perspectives. What is the total project cost for such an operation? Within that total cost, what does it take to operate a typical community school? What are the major components of those operating costs and what is the cost per student enrolled? In addition to examining input costs, the cost-effectiveness of these schools is then reviewed. Cost-effectiveness is measured in terms of cost to support a single student through completion of primary school.

In a 1997 evaluation, Muskin reported that total USAID funding for Save the Children's work on this project through1999 was $6.8 million. Figures from a 1999 analysis show costs for start-up, operation, and management of Sikasso community schools during that decade totaled $3 million, of which $2.6 million was for the ongoing operation of schools and their community-based management committees. The average annual recurrent unit cost per student was $47, broken down as shown in the adjacent table. Additionally, $7 per student per year was expended for start-up costs, including infrastructure amortized over 10 years and curriculum and materials development amortized over five years, according to Tietjen's 1999 USAID Bureau for Africa Technical Paper, *Community Schools in Mali: A Comparative Cost Study.*

Tietjan's data from Mali for a comparable time period show average recurrent unit costs for public primary schools of $30 per student, 80 to 90 percent of which is for teacher salaries. It is not surprising that the community schools in Sikasso appear to be more costly on a per student basis than the national average recurrent expenditure per student in Mali. Community schools are by design serving a population and region that otherwise would have limited access to school. This must be compared to what it would cost the government to extend access to the villages served by community schools, and not just to the cost of the government running its existing system. It can be safely

assumed that if government were to extend access to the least served regions in Mali, its unit costs would be higher. In fact, community school costs represent the best available example of what it would cost to get the public system to reach the populations it currently does not.

The cost-effectiveness of community schools in Sikasso can be evaluated in terms of their average cost to produce a primary school completer and in terms of the cost to produce a completer who passes the CEP. Completion rates for community schools in Sikasso in 2003 were 67 percent, compared to 56 percent in the region's public schools. Based on the unit costs presented, the cost per completing student in the community schools equates to $421, compared to $322 for public schools. Community schools have a higher completion rate, so their lower cost-effectiveness is due exclusively to their higher unit costs. While their unit cost is 57 percent higher than that of public schools, their cost per completing student is only 31 percent higher. Community schools in Sikasso have a CEP pass rate of 51 percent and, therefore, has a cost per student who passes the exam of $825. In public schools in Kolondieba, a subregion of Sikasso, the pass rate is 43 percent, a cost per student passing the exam of $749—only 10 percent lower than in the community schools.

	Unit Cost	Portion of Total
Teacher Salaries	$2	4%
Teacher In-service & Support	$3	5%
Teacher & Learning Materials	$20	44%
Maintenance	$2	4%
Management Committee Support	$13	27%
NGO Operations	$7	15%
TOTAL	**$47**	**100%**

Critical Features of Community Schools

Almost 800 community schools in Sikasso have been developed though the support of a USAID-funded, Save the Children-implemented project. Of those schools, Save the Children's local field office has directly supported about 130 primary schools and has worked with 16 local NGOs to support an additional 650 to 670 schools, according to Save the Children's *Back to School Report: Community Schools Supported by Save the Children and its Malian NGO Partners, 1998-1999*. All the schools adhered to the same model, which started out providing three years of basic education focused on acquisition of functional literacy in the native tongue. The model evolved to include the full six-year primary cycle. Community schools therefore progressively introduced French as a subject and medium of instruction in grades four through six. In all cases, the Sikasso community schools are distinguished by certain significant features:

- They are founded and operated by a school management committee (SMC) comprised of locally selected community members.
- The teachers are locally recruited and often have very limited formal education.

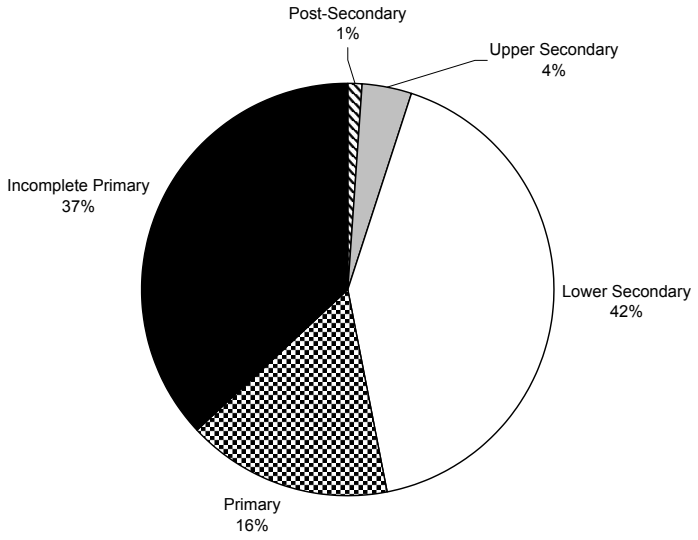
- The SMC hires and pays the teachers.
- Children are enrolled in three-year age groups of six, seven, and eight year olds on a triennial basis.

NGOs worked with villages that did not have public schools but had expressed an interest in starting a community school. Traditional village leaders each designated a five-member SMC responsible for compiling a list of children to enroll, setting fee levels, collecting money, and identifying and recruiting candidates for teaching positions. The SMC holds all governing and operational decision making authority for the school, setting the calendar and school hours, managing staff and payroll, and resolving all day-to-day issues. Save the Children or one of its affiliated local NGOs provides training for the SMC, supports teacher and student identification, helps find an appropriate site for the school, supplies furniture and classroom materials, and facilitates the formal relationship between the community school and the local education authority. The community school submits a declaration of opening to the local authorities, allowing the government and education ministry to include it part of their normal inspection and supervision duties and add the data from the school to the national education statistics.

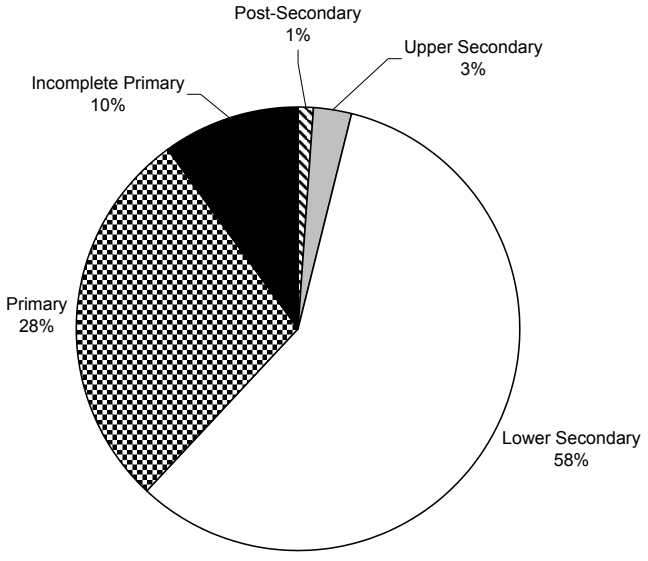
First through third grade teachers are required to live in the village and have at least adult literacy training, in lieu of formal schooling. The NGO provides the initial four-week training over the course of three months and plans a two-week follow-up in-service each year. The training program was developed with input from the Malian Ministry of Education and the National Pedagogical Institute. The ministry also created a special category of teachers within the legal framework for community schools, making it possible to hire less qualified teachers and pay them outside the existing salary scales. The same ministerial declaration also gave authority to SMCs to determine the salaries of teachers they employ. In Sikasso, teachers are paid 3,500 FCFA per month, taken from school fees and general village association contributions collected by the SMC, according to Grossman and Millogo in *Save the Children U.S. Village Schools in Mali 1992-2003: A Future to Quality Access?*, prepared for the 2003 Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) biennial meeting. Teachers often also receive in-kind support from the community.

Initially, the community schools relied on teachers with very low levels of formal schooling. As grades four through six were added, teachers with more academic experience and French ability were needed. Ninety percent of community school teachers have no official teacher certification, compared to 59 percent of public school teachers. As depicted in the following Teacher Levels of Education charts, only 58 percent of public school teachers have completed lower secondary, compared to 42 percent in community schools. Almost four times as many community school teachers as public school teachers have not completed primary school. The majority of teachers in Sikasso community schools still had only primary or incomplete primary education by 2002-2003.

Teacher Levelos of Education in Sikasso Community Schools (2002-2003)



Teacher Levels of Education in Sikasso Public Schools (2002-2003)



The ongoing support and supervision provided by NGOs and the local education authorities partly compensated for the teachers' lack of formal education. Within the local education office, one pedagogical counselor is assigned to each community school and pays visits as often as once a week.

Originally, the community schools were meant to provide functional literacy after three years of schooling, offering students the option to continue on to fourth grade at a traditional public school. In fact, significant policy negotiation in the early years of the project focused on assuring entry into fourth grade for community school students. At the end of the three-year cycle, most villages opted to extend their community schools, adding grades four through six. Now schools focus on preparing students to complete the primary cycle and pass the CEP.

The initial three-year curriculum introduced in Sikasso community schools was developed and adapted from the adult literacy curriculum, which focuses on agriculture and health. The curriculum was organized around village life, agriculture and natural resource management, and health and basic business skills, in addition to reading, writing, mathematics, history, geography, and observation. It was designed to meet the needs of a rural setting. Functional literacy and numeracy skills were combined with life skills and knowledge that would enable children to make better use of their villages' resources, improve their health, and deal with the commercial world. To implement the curriculum, each teacher was supplied with a teaching guide and a local language reader.

Save the Children also promoted a child-centered pedagogy, but two different Sikasso community school evaluations revealed that teachers tended to use mostly traditional methods. Active learning techniques, when attempted, were poorly applied. Students were rarely engaged in activities and did not regularly discuss topics among themselves. For the most part, community school teachers appeared to mimic the pedagogy of traditional formal public schools, with only some evidence of students asking questions or teachers using open-ended techniques encouraged in community schools.

Policy and Institutional Context

Community schools in Mali have evolved from operating outside the official education system to being recognized components of that system. Furthermore, the community school movement of the 1990s influenced the current and future development of Mali's education sector. Community schools gained official recognition as a result of the education laws of 1994, which came about thanks to intense lobbying by the local and international NGO community and pressure from USAID through an explicit condition for its large education program in the early 1990s.

With official status came increased attention and support from the Malian Ministry of Education. This made it possible for community schools to influence how the country and federal government approached its long-term education development strategy. Community schools demonstrated that basic education could be delivered in locally constructed buildings with locally recruited, less qualified teachers and using native

local languages under the management and control of the communities themselves. The 10-year program officially adopted by Mali in 1999 incorporates many of these lessons. Most significant is the *pédagogie convergente*, which made native language instruction with French as a separate subject the norm for grades one to three, with the progressive introduction of spoken French as the means of instruction in the upper primary grades.

USAID provided a large share of the financial resources that drove the rapid development of community schools in Mali. During the period from 1997 to 2003, USAID contributed between $35 and $40 million to support the development of community schools. That funding is no longer available. The communities supported through USAID's agreement with Save the Children must now rely entirely on the funds they generate locally to continue to operate their schools. Not only does this present a real challenge to many communities, it also renders community schools inherently inequitable. Why should parents who send their children to public schools not have to pay for the operation of their schools, while parents in villages with community schools cover the entire cost of their children's education?

If the community school movement in Mali can be said to have successfully demonstrated an alternative approach to opening and running primary schools, it can also be said that it has failed to address long-term sustainability and funding, which wer identified as issues as early as 1995 in DeStefano's *Community-Based Primary Education: Lessons Learned from the Basic Education Expansion Project in Mali*, published by USAID. At no point during its experience in Sikasso did Save the Children address the issue of government funding for community schools. During the course of 10 years' experience, there was no experimentation with new ways for the Ministry of Education to allocate funds to community schools without subverting the local government or CMS's authority, which lies at the heart of this model.

Recently, Mali has negotiated a debt relief program that frees up resources for a monthly 25,000 FCFA stipend to contracted teachers, including 5,000 community school teachers, according to The World Bank's March 2004 *Education for All–Fast Track Initiative Progress Report*. While this provides some needed resources to community schools, it also raises several questions. For how long is the central government committed to paying community school teachers? Is the expectation that responsibility for teacher salaries will eventually revert back to the local SMCs, or do government long-term financial plans include continuing to pay community school teachers? If not, and SMCs were struggling to meet the requirements of paying their teachers 3,500 FCFA per month, how will SMCs assume responsibility for this much higher stipend? Furthermore, the funds for the stipends are being allocated through the local education authority, not through the SMCs themselves. This risks severing the employer-employee relationship between SMCs and their teachers.

In addition to questions of equity and financial uncertainty in the future of Malian community schools, the question of quality remains. Available data show that community schools achieve quality roughly equal to what is obtained in public schools.

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EQUIP2
Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy ▪ Systems ▪ Management

Evidence suggests that community schools are able to obtain comparable or superior results using teachers with much less education and relying on local management and control, both of which are significant. However, the low level of achievement is clearly still not satisfactory.

The challenge, therefore, becomes greater than just how to assure financial flows so that community schools can continue to operate. Rather, the focus must fall squarely on community school support and improvement so that they can not just produce results comparable to government schools, but provide children in Mali with a solid foundation for future development and learning.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written for EQUIP2 by Joseph DeStefano (Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling), 2006. A summary of findings from three case studies, *Meeting EFA: Cost-Effectiveness of Complementary Approaches*, is also available.

EQUIP2: Educational Policy, Systems Development, and Management is one of three USAID-funded Leader with Associates Cooperative Agreements under the umbrella heading Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP). As a Leader with Associates mechanism, EQUIP2 accommodates buy-in awards from USAID bureaus and missions to support the goal of building education quality at the national, sub-national, and cross-community levels.

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) is the lead organization for the global EQUIP2 partnership of education and development organizations, universities, and research institutions. The partnership includes fifteen major organizations and an expanding network of regional and national associates throughout the world: Aga Khan Foundation, American Institutes for Research, CARE, Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling, East-West Center, Education Development Center, International Rescue Committee, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Michigan State University, Mississippi Consortium for International Development, ORC Macro, Research Triangle Institute, University of Minnesota, University of Pittsburgh Institute of International Studies in Education, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

For more information about EQUIP2, please contact:

USAID
Patrick Collins
CTO EGAT/ED
USAID Washington
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20532
Tel: 202-712-4151
Email: pcollins@usaid.gov

AED
John Gillies
EQUIP2 Project Director
1825 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202-884-8256
Email: equip2@aed.org
Web: www.equip123.net